

# Corvi Chronicle

*Journal of the American Society of Crows and Ravens Vol. XXIII, No. 1, 2008(C.E.)*

## SPECULATIVELY SPEAKING

### *Evolutionary thoughts on improving human physiology*



I note that in discussions of evolution both nay and yes sayers are given space in the pages of the Chronicle. This is to be expected in a fine journal of opinion and speculation such as yours. *(The above is intended, my dear editor, as a compliment which I find it well to offer at the beginning of communications such as the following. EF)* In regard to how we got to be as we are, I have no dog in that fight as peckerwoods and politicians might say. There is an abundance of both in Gullbill County from which I hail but can no longer be well or otherwise met.

However, while squabbling about our origins both those who believe either miraculous endowment or slow change are responsible generally show little interest in what -- physiologically -- we may become. On both sides of these questions there are zealous, zoological Luddites who seem convinced that what we now are is the best we can or should be; that our shape and attributes must eternally remain as presently fixed. Thought must be given, as I have, to possible changes and betterment. *(Admittedly we may change, be changed for the worse; e.g., become wormlike beings and in consequence robin food or as Charles Darwin put it, "the intestines of the earth." But generally being a happy, optimistic person*



By Corvi 7, Tucson, Ariz.

*the following speculations are restricted to changes which may improve and uplift us. EF)* Let us begin, my dear editor, rather simply by considering the creature we mutually admire so greatly, i.e., the crow.

... By any objective measure the beaks of crows are superior, in terms of utility an aesthetics, to the stubby snouts of humans. If -- whether by divine endowment or evolutionary processes -- our species were to possess good beaks they should prove to be as welcome as a third hand, giving us an always available tweezer-like, Swiss army knife-type personal appendage. Beaks would make it much easier and safer to use miniaturized keyboards, feed infants, extract slivers, pick lint, berries and nits. Beaks might interfere with certain unmentionable foreign per-

versions but encourage wholesome displays of affection. Think billing and cooing.

Could creatures configured as we are become beaked? Fish who in this matter would seem to be in worse shape than we are have done it, e.g., the tarpon and gar. Closer to phylogenic home there is the duck-billed platypus. However, if this animal were to be a model, prudence should be exercised. Egg laying might well undermine traditional family values and we are, figuratively speaking, venomous enough and have no need to grow poison spurs on

our ankles.

*(In the matter of beaks I readily acknowledge that others have preceded me as evidenced by Roman friezes and Pinocchio legends. EF)*

... Throughout recorded history the advantages of flight have been apparent to people and the urge to take flight themselves, a common one. As a rather feeble technical response we have devised various large, noisy machines in which we uneasily sit as captive aerial riders. But these contraptions are becoming increasingly uncomfortable, undependable, unsafe and environmentally malign. The time has come to gird up our genes and/or

*Continued on page 2*

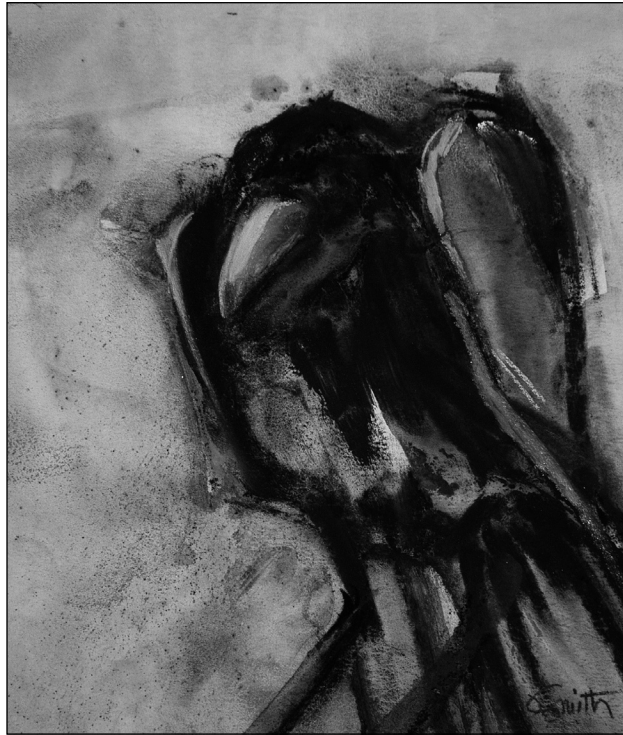
## SPECULATIVELY SPEAKING *continued*

# Considering wings, tails and sexual activity

raise prayers for the purpose of becoming winged, every mother's child, woman and man of us. Honor Icarus while considering the bat. While we must not be content to remain perpetually inferior to toothy mice, something in a nice pliable leather or even a synthetic might indeed suit us better than feathers. (*Given proper design, materials and manipulation a wing or two wings should serve to protect against rain or excessive sun as umbrellas and parasols do. EF*)

When they moved up from being snakes and lizards to be flyers, the birds had to lose a little weight. Most probably we would need to do the same but given the present concerns about the "obesity epidemic" this would be an ancillary boon.

Even if we did not become as adept in the air as crows, the advantages of being only modest flyers are too numerous to summarize here. However, by way of a single example, take commuting: workers gliding out of their homes and soaring to their places of employment. Traffic congestions and accidents will be largely eliminated. While it may be in heavily used flight paths that two, say, bookkeepers occasionally bump into each other the consequences will be far less for them and others than those which follow a collision between 727s or even SUVs. Our dependence on foreign or any oil will be greatly reduced a happening from which great geo-political, economic and environmental benefits will accrue. It is true that flying commuters will expend more energy than do present ones sitting on cushioned, faux leather seats. But the winged individuals will be engaging at least twice a day in good, cardiac friendly exercise. Parking lots can be replaced with turf and much reduced in size since the spatial requirements of an attorney in a BMW, are approximately 6.8 times greater than those of a personally winged attorney. And so forth and so forth and so forth.



"Crow for Poncho" pastel by Judith Gebhard Smith of Nightwing Studios, Olympia, Wash. To view more of her work visit: <http://www.nightwingstudio.com/>

...To go aerial, tails will no doubt be required. But even if we remain terrestrial tails are worth considering. Unless we turn aquatic the beaver model may be a bit specialized but a long prehensile one of the sort possessed by spider monkeys would be of great general utility. Simply for aesthetic reasons something rather bushy and boldly marked would be an attractive adornment and perhaps make us a more expressive species. Envision if you will, my dear editor, the effects a populist politician, actor or actress might create by artfully lifting, pointing or swishing his or her raccoon style tail. At very least any tail will improve balance and stimulate the fashion industry.

... As is the case with many other very successful birds and mammals, crows are sexually active for only a brief period of each year. To emulate them we might set aside a few weeks as Arousal Month. (*February, presently a dreary,*

*uninspiring time of the year, would serve admirably for this purpose. EF*) If this were done genuine crimes of passion would be virtually eliminated during the other 11 months. Subliminal crimes of passion, robbery, embezzlement, and DWI etc. would be greatly reduced as would be such undesirable afflictions as: lying (both the white and red-handed variety), brawling, depression, many allergies, anorexia, excessive consumption of alcohol, tranquilizers and diet pills, inter-sex guerilla and psychological warfare. Cheer leaders, high heels and swim wear (except in the most northerly waters) could be eliminated. Cable TV networks would be freed up to offer instructive programming dealing with art, literature and philosophy, thus protecting small children and maidens from soft and other pornography.

It is granted that Arousal Month might become a bit riotous at times. However, exhaustion tends to have a calming effect. Also knowing precisely when it was to begin and end would give authorities ample time to prepare and deploy for this annual outburst. While it was ongoing pubescent youths might be sent off to spend a month-long holiday with great-grandparents or other calm and collected seniors. (*In this subject area, "Becoming Calm and Collecting" by Josiah Carbury of Brown University is a must read. EF*)

When contemplating our possibilities the above, my endearing editor, but scratches the surface, an expression. Weightier phenomena – such as horns, hooves, trunks, migration, hibernation and parthenogenesis – await commentary. I may be reached at TelPath 11 or any Undeviated Channel.

I remain your eternally admiring  
– Euclid Fangborn



## RESPONDING

## On understanding motives of any species

*Editor's note: In the last issue of the Chronicle an article, "What Are They Doing" dealt with crows and ravens who seemingly were grieving for deceased companions as people do. Among the responses from readers were the following:*

EDITOR, CORVI CHRONICLE: RE MOURNFUL CROWS

Except for the simplest and most basic of behaviors it seems to me that we can only speculate anthropomorphically about the motives of other species whose minds and emotions are very different from and inaccessible to our own. After all we often have great difficulty understanding the intents and purposes of other people from whom direct testimony can be taken. In fact, I suspect that as I sometimes am, other individuals are uncertain about why they act as they do. To be fanciful about this, the following Associated Press story reports a happening which recently occurred in Manila:

MANILA – Religious believers convinced that flat tires were the key to salvation deflated tires on scores of buses and cars yesterday, paralyzing traffic throughout the city. Police arrested 32 people.

Terrified motorists abandoned their vehicles and fled for cover as police chased the believers, who swarmed through the stalled traffic, deflating more tires. Others flagged own buses and then let the air out before drivers could stop them.

It was unclear what purpose the believers thought had been

served by the action. When pressed for an explanation, they said only that their leader, Alelio Bernaldez Pen, told them it was God's will.

"This is God's order to let out air," said Honora Dimagila, 44, who was arrested yesterday. "Air is from God. This is the solution to the crisis in our country."

Handbills distributed by the group called The Reserved Manpower of the Good Wisdom for All Nations, said deflating tires was "God's way of stopping bad deeds."

The handbills promised a new era of equality and social justice, including a daily wage of \$30 for everyone. Annual per capita income in the Philippines is about \$750.

Now suppose a well-qualified field biologist from another world landed in Manila as the air-letting incident was taking place. It seems most unlikely that the alien observer or colleagues to whom he described the happening would be able to determine the correct motive – whatever it

is – for this behavior. – *Minor Ocam, San Francisco*

GENTLECORVI:

I am no more sure that crows will not eat the flesh of other crows than I am that human beings will not eat the flesh of other human beings.

Crows being considered a pest by the farmers amongst whom I was raised, I was at times dispatched to hunt these birds. While thus engaged I commonly confronted crow behavior similar to that reported by professor Don Lynch and the retired naval officer. If I shot at the crows and missed, they would quietly fly away, theoretically frightened off by the sound of the shot. One could easily imagine that if I shot one of the crows, the report of the firearm would drive them off.

This is not usually the case. If one shoots a crow, the behavior of the rest of the flock is to circle back around screaming their heads off. This often presents the possibility of killing a second crow, after which the crows leave off with this nonsense and fly away. As mentioned in your article "What Are They Doing?" one may postulate to their heart's content.

I propose that like human beings, crows try to help their comrades who are in trouble, as long as the risk is within acceptable limits. Rather than human expectations, machinations, and resources; they must make do with crow prospects, connivance and recourses.

Thanking you for your kind attention, I am – *Graves, Seaside Ore.*

### PAEAN

By Birch Pavelsky, Fairbanks, Alaska

*There is always a raven in my life,  
above the railroad or between dull buildings,  
and hunting dead Twinkies in the Foodland  
parking lot,  
or far away flickering behind the combed forest.*

*He undulates and winks against the sky,  
calls to me with liquid words, "Look Look!"  
And someday I will see because of raven.*

The *Corvi Chronicle* is published irregularly by corvi who have an interest in or need for doing so for members of The American Society of Crows and Ravens and others. There is no subscription fee, but it is customary and seemly to send contributions to pay for production and mailing. There is a direct connection between contributions, the size of the Chronicle and its frequency of distribution. Those who do not choose to contribute will continue to receive the Chronicle and enjoy all membership privileges. However, they will no doubt suffer a loss of self-esteem and may occasionally be mocked by other corvi.

Members are reminded to make new corvi by duplicating and passing along issues of the Chronicle.

ASCAR has a home page or chat room on the Internet:

<http://www.ascaronline.org/>

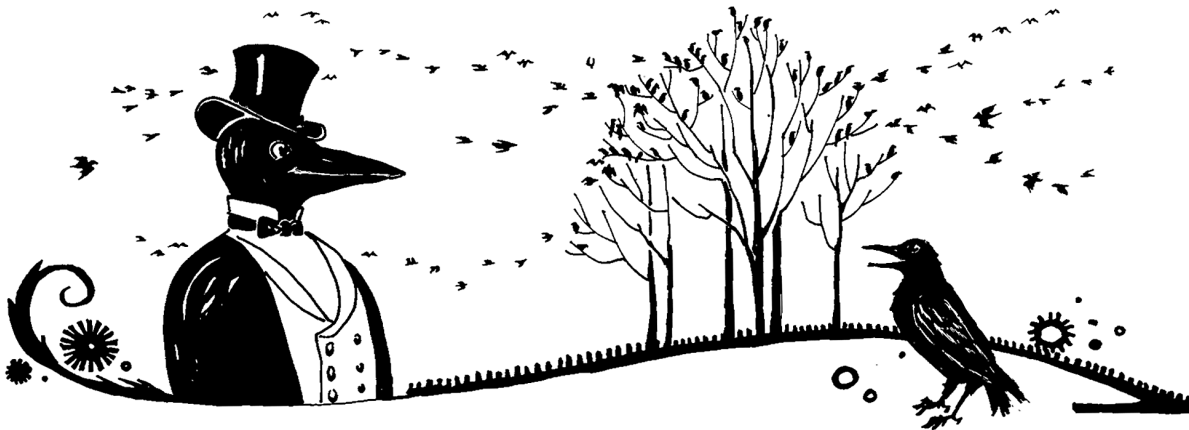
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## THE TALK OF THE ROOST

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### CORVID CANDID CAMERA

An Oct. 9, 2007, New York Times article, "A Bird's-thigh View of Tool-Making Sheds Light on Crows," by Henry Fountain caught the eye of Corvi 16 in New Preston, Conn.

We learned that when Christian Rutz, a biologist at the University of Oxford in England, and his colleagues wanted to research the tool-using abilities of the New Caledonian crows (*Corvus moneduloides*) in the wild, they developed a half-ounce video camera to attach to a crow's tail feathers.

Rutz told the N.Y. Times: "They are very shy, very sensitive to disturbance. We really needed a nifty little way to spy on them. That's when the idea was born, why not hitch a ride with a wild crow?"

With Lucas A. Bluff, Alex A. S. Weir and Alex Kacelnik, Rutz recorded more than seven hours of video -- the first detailed account of the species' natural foraging ecology.

The video cameras drop off the birds as they molt. The lens points between the bird's legs and transmits about an hour of video to researchers secluded nearby.

In the November 2007 issue of Science magazine the Oxford zoologists reported: "Our video-cameras revealed that prey items collected during long bouts of ground-foraging are considerably smaller than the wood-boring beetle larvae that crows often hunt with stick tools. This finding highlights the potential economic and evolutionary relevance of tool use for New Caledonian crows. We also dis-

covered a novel mode of tool use, and a hitherto unknown tool material, illustrating that tool-assisted foraging by crows is more plastic than previously thought. 'Video-tracking' may have considerable potential for studying the behavior and ecology of many other bird species that are shy, or live in inaccessible habitats."

The N.Y. Times noted that among their findings the Oxford researchers reported that two crows fashioned tools from dried grass stems, a previously unknown tool, and used them to probe the ground, perhaps searching for ants. "In the past everybody thought they mainly used stick tools to fish for large beetle larvae in rotting wood," Rutz said.

The N.Y. Times noted: "One crow showed a preference for a particular stick -- using it, putting it down, using it again, and then flying with it about 100 yards to a new location. Rutz said this behavior suggested, 'the cost of transportation is outweighed by the benefits of this being a particularly good tool.'"

The "Video Cameras on Wild Birds" research was first reported in the Oct. 4, 2007, edition of Science Express, an online service of Science magazine for selected articles in advance of their publication in the magazine. <http://www.sciencemag.org/cgi/content/abstract/318/5851/765>

### YOUTUBE NATURALLY

Newer model digital cameras and even cell phones are designed to video action making it possible

for anyone to record anything observable -- and post it online -- naturalists and bird enthusiasts included.

Now three years old YouTube.com is a combination of private and commercial video clips that can be searched by subject. We typed in "crows and ravens" and got a glut of videos about rock groups and a handful of video clips featuring companion birds or encounters in urban and wild locations. The picture quality can be edgy and with commentary or musical accompaniment that can range from distracting to annoying.

Three worth the watch may be Attenborough Crows in the City, a clip of crows in Japan dropping nuts onto busy trafficways. One crow's flight to the pavement is particularly stunning to watch despite David Attenborough's voice over commentary. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGPGknpq3e0>

Another clip of crows in action in a public park in Japan quietly demonstrates persistence in opening a garbage basket. The Web address is [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2bdU8\\_V6tQ&NR=1](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2bdU8_V6tQ&NR=1)

A popular crow video on YouTube seems to be replicated under a variety of titles involving tool-making. The video records a crow in a lab setting crafting a tool to retrieve a miniature bucket presumably loaded with food. The action is fast and so deliberate you want to applaud when the crow hauls the bucket to perch level. Web address <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03ykewnc0oE>

# ROOST NOTES

## 1914 corvi stories

EDITOR'S NOTE: We received the following article 10 years ago from Corvi 35 in San Francisco but space rarely permitted including even the excerpts of the original article from Harper's Monthly magazine in the spring of 1914, "The Companionable Crow," by Walter Prichard Eaton. Corvi 35 stumbled on Eaton's article while researching 1913 and 1914 periodicals "trying to get a snapshot of the zeitgeist just prior to 'the Great War' (WWI) – a sobering feeling reading all these happy, unconcerned serialized romances and articles about all things trivial, and realizing these people were all on the brink of a world-shattering war that would suck them all in and destroy utterly an entire generation. It seemed a particularly happy time, too ... then August, 1914 ..."

We learned that during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Eaton was a noted American essayist, drama critic and professor of playwriting at Yale. The following was one of Eaton's many essays on the natural and social history of New England. At the time he was a considerable celebrity, his best known play "The Man Who Found Christmas" – having been produced in New York a few months earlier. Though written 94 years ago, Eaton's reflections remain one of the best of all crow appreciations. Here are some excerpts:

**T**he American crow (*Corvus americanus*) is the wisest of all our birds, the best able to take care of himself under any and all circumstances, the most difficult to exterminate, and yet the easiest to tame. He has, from the earliest settlement of the country, been looked upon as a pest, and his tribe has enriched our language with the word scarecrow. Probably he was regarded as a pest long before the advent of the Mayflower; the squaws of the Six Nations doubtless shooed him from their maize-plantings while Joseph was hoarding corn in Egypt, and the braves of the Six Nations affirmed that you never saw a crow when you had your bow with you. ...

...But does any one love the crow? Has any one thought how much poorer, less characteristic, our landscape would be were he exterminated? We have sent our sluggards to the ant for instruction, but have we considered the crow, adept in cooperation, intelligently gregarious, with what the Farmers' Bulletin calls "the social instinct" highly developed? It would seem that our New England farmers, at any rate, have much to learn from this despised bird! One man, of course, appreciated him – Thoreau; but he appreciated everything in our native fields and forests. And I doubt not that every man who as a boy once had a pet crow loves still the entire species and finds a wistful music in their call. ...

...The possession of a pet crow is not only an endless source of amusement – not unmixed at times with annoyance at his mischief, almost as in the case of a pet monkey – but it affords an opportunity to study the habits of the bird, especially his diet. As the whole question of the crow's destructiveness is concerned with his diet, this study has peculiar interest, and the

case of Jim Stone, captured in May, 1913, is worth recording. ...

... [Jim] had the free range not only of the garden behind the house, but of the whole farm and the Berkshire Hills beyond. No effort whatever was made to confine him. Yet he, in his turn, showed no disposition to depart and join his feathered fellows. As a matter of fact, he showed an odd fear of his own kind and when wild crows came into the garden, he would fly hastily to the protection of the woodshed or the kitchen door. ...

...It was curious to watch his instinct to hide things manifest itself in a hundred odd ways, to the human mind not in the least related to a food-supply. Any small object which was bright and shining particularly attracted him, and he would spend hours attempting to hide bits of broken crockery or glass in the dog's fur or in his ear. Don's ear was a favorite hiding-place. Jim would get a bit of crockery in his beak, hop upon the dog's head, drop it neatly into his ear, and then carefully fold the ear-flap down over the aperture. If Don objected and raised his ear again, Jim would once more grab it and fold it down, scolding meanwhile. If Don were wide-awake he did not seem to mind this performance in the least, but if he chanced to be sleepy he would get up with a bored air, shake out the crockery from his ear, and with the look of one who says, "For Heaven's sake, why can't they leave me in peace!" walk away to some other place. Nothing discouraged, Jim would slowly follow along behind him, keeping an eye cocked meanwhile for a fresh bit of shiny stuff (even a bright pebble would do), and, when Don once more lay down, the entire operation would be repeated.

One could never be certain at these times how far Jim's actions were purely teleological – the exercise in captivity of instincts upon which the endurance of the wild species depends – and how far there was mingled with them an almost human love of tease. Of that there could be no doubt. He knew, too, just as a dog knows, who could be teased and who couldn't. There were two lambs on the place, one a stolid creature, and one of totally different temperament, highly excitable, in fact. Jim discovered the difference after a single trial. As they were frisking about one day he lit first on the back of one and then on the back of the other, sinking his claws into the wool with a good grip, flapping his wings, and cawing delightedly. One lamb paid no attention to him, but the other immediately took fright and began to buck like a bronco, or rather an animated saw-horse, and then to cavort about the pasture lot. Thereafter Jim confined his attentions entirely to her. He never tried to ride the other lamb, but again and again he would pounce down suddenly upon the poor timid one's back, set up a great flapping and cawing, and speedily enjoy a free ride over a goodly portion of the surrounding landscape. ...

Jim – like all tame crows that I have ever had anything to do with – in spite of his evident desire for human compan-

*Continued on page 6*



## ROOST NOTES *continued*

# Niagara Falls crows going with the floe

ionship, never really showed any affection. It was as if those gregarious instincts which have made the crow family so successful in the evolutionary struggle were merely perverted a little and Jim flocked with us. Often he would hop upon the window-sill when the family were inside, and peck at the pane, uttering his queer gibber of low caws and crow talk; but it was merely to induce somebody to come out and pay attention to him. He would let you stroke him on the head – would even beg you to, in fact; but that was merely because he enjoyed the physical sensation, not because it was a form of contact with one he loved, as in the case of the dog. Try to put your hand about his body and pick him up, and away he would struggle, with an angry oath, his instinct of personal independence roused into fierce resentment. After all, a crow is a bird, a creature of the air, of the free spaces. He has a marvelous adaptability to human companionship, but his heart remains aloft. ...

**H**ow close a crow is to the intelligence of such an animal as the dog has been attested on numerous occasions. I once knew a pet crow many years ago, for example, which belonged to a small boy on a farm. The boy's grandfather lived a few hundred yards away, and every morning of the year the crow flew first to the grandfather's house, waking that old gentleman up with almost clockwork regularity (he seldom varied more than 15 minutes, though the sun, supposedly his timepiece, varied whole hours), and then he returned and roused his own family. The rousing process was simple. He perched on a bedroom window-sill and cawed. Sleep thereafter became impossible. If you are fond of sleeping late in the morning, by the way, do not try to keep a pet crow, or you may become as profane as he. It was this same crow which, greatly to our delight and the teacher's wrath, followed his little master to school one morning, pounced upon the school house key when the teacher dropped it, and, flying to a low branch over her head, sat there for nearly half an hour, replying sarcastically to her threats. He used to come to meet his master almost every day when school was out, again telling the time by some instinct as mysterious as a dog's and either riding home on his master's shoulder or else flying along ahead, lighting on the fence posts. It was the same crow too, I recall, who got into the house, upset a bottle of ink, investigated the contents with his feet, and then walked on the bedspread. It was a seven-day wonder in the neighborhood that, because of his master's pleading, his life was spared. We youngsters looked with a kind of awe upon a boy who could put up a case to his justly irate parents. Demosthenes seemed, by comparison, rather second-rate.

...  
**A** year or two ago I passed through Niagara in midwinter and stopped over a day to ride through the gorge below the Falls in order to see the superb spectacle of the great

ice-cakes tossing and grinding in the whirl and chop of the rapids. After the first narrow rush of the river was over and the stream widened and grew comparatively calm, I was amazed to see almost every ice-cake bearing a black rider. At first I could not trust my eyes, and asked a native if those riders were crows. He assured me that they were fishing for scraps in the water. I watched the birds for nearly an hour, and he was quite right. They were fishing for scraps of food, and it was easier and probably safer to fish from the edge of an ice-cake than to fly low over this turbulent current, where the waves were uncertain in their sudden up-jump, and in zero weather when wet feathers meant an ice-coat. The surrounding country lay two feet deep in snow, so that food was probably very scarce. But here, on this stream that never freezes, floated the refuse of the towns just above, and the crows knew it. They rode their ice-cakes in countless numbers – thousands upon thousands of them, and their black bodies winged up out of the gorge against the white Canadian slopes. They were for the most part silent, however, though now and then a faint caw came over the titanic hiss of the rapids. It seemed to me as convincing a demonstration as I had ever seen of the crows' intelligent adaptability to a changing environment.

But the very next week I saw still another example. I chanced to be riding through Long Island, and in many of the fields in the central portion corn shocks still stood, and there were patches of oats here and there, or perhaps only single stalks now and again, missed by the reapers and left lying on the ground. At all such spots the crows were congregated. But the following night it snowed, and in the morning I saw flight after flight of crows headed south toward the seashore, without doubt making for the water's edge, where they could still get a food, either shellfish or refuse cast up by the tide. ...

**T**he crows, indeed, are masters of mobilization. Nearly every one who has lived much in the country with his eyes open has probably seen an example of this. Some years ago I was walking in an upland pasture which ran like a deep, narrow fiord into the woods on the western wall of one of the Franconia hills. I was on my way to search for a hermit-thrush's nest. Suddenly, over my head, I noticed a crow in rapid, excited flight. He had come out of the woods to the south, and flew across the pasture and into the woods to the north, keeping close to the woods to the tops of the pointed firs and cawing raucously from time to time. I wondered if the bird which had just passed over my head were not a courier, so I sat down to wait. In a very few moments about 20 crows, flying in irregular formation, came out of the first to the north, went swiftly over my head and disappeared southward. Shortly after another detachment appeared, and then another and another and another. Sometimes there were only a few birds at a time.

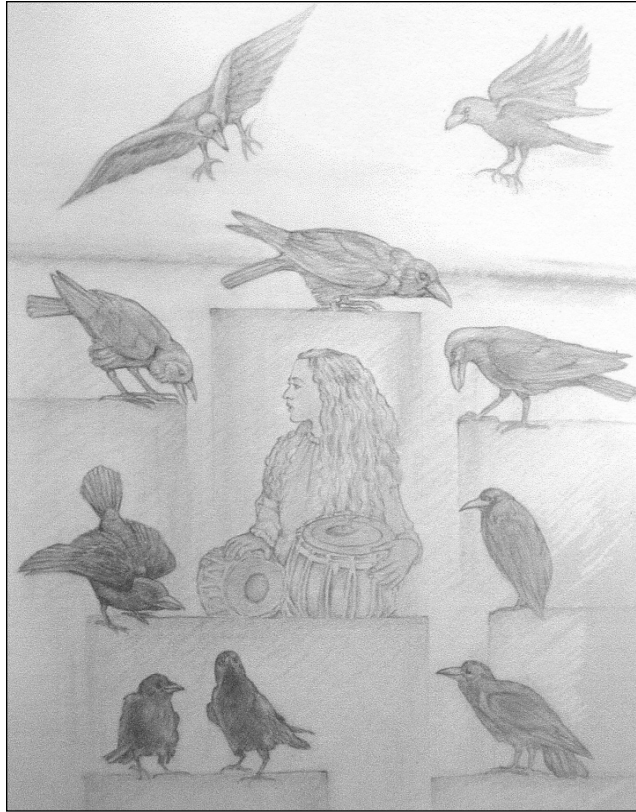
*Continued on page 7*



ROOST NOTES *continued**Crow: woven into texture of our memories*

sometimes as many as a hundred, flying seldom more than three or four abreast, their line streaming out raggedly. That first northward-flying courier had done his errand with marvelous rapidity! The birds kept coming for half an hour, I should say. They flew for the most part in silence, only the leaders cawing, as if they were crying, "This way! This way!" But a far-off noise of the gathering to the south began to come faintly to my ear as it was augmented by new throats, birds doubtless arriving from the south as well as the north. Unfortunately, this gathering was well up on the mountainside at least a mile away from me, and between lay a tract of forest which had been lumbered some 15 years before, and even my curiosity to learn the cause of this mobilization could not induce me to attempt the passage. Any one who has wrestled with old lumber slash on a mountainside will understand.

But such mobilizations have frequently been investigated. Usually they prove to be for the attack on some enemy. Thoreau speaks of the crows "bursting up above the woods, where they were perching, like the black fragments of a powder-mill just exploded." When they are gathered for war purposes their cries will lead you to the spot where they are fighting, and these same bursts of black fragments above the trees, usually following an especial uproar of cawing, will direct you to the center of the battle. Walter King Stone, the illustrator of this paper, and Charles Livingston Bull have told me of a mobilization they once witnessed, when the crows gathered for hours, and the two observers were able to penetrate the woods to the exact spot beneath the feathered explosions. There they found a great horned owl, flying low in the trees, with a dead crow in his talons. Whether this was the original cause of the battle, or whether he had grabbed a crow in one of the descents of the birds about his head, they of course could not say. He was evidently struggling to find a dead tree where he could take refuge. He was saved probably by the coming of night. Crows have even been known to attack foxes, as Winslow Homer's painting is the most famous witness. ...



Art by Nanda Currant, New Mexico artist, illustrator, educator, who says "birds ... often act as reminders of the fullness of existence, the beauty of sound and movement, and how much my imagination wants to take flight." To view her work visit: <http://members.cruzio.com/~hearth/website/fineart/fineart.html>

But the crow does not escape attack, in his turn, by birds smaller than himself, upon whose eggs and young he sometimes preys – which is his real sin. Every one has seen a crow flying along a New England pasture hedgerow in June, and heard the attendant startled clamor of the smaller birds, fearful for their young; and every one has probably seen a crow, perhaps the same marauder, set upon by a pair of kingbirds – pugnacious fellows who appear to have constituted themselves a police force – and driven off. They fly over the head of the larger bird, like aeroplanes over a dirigible, and dart down savagely from time to time. The crow never relishes these attacks any more than the hawk, does, and usually flies for cover as speedily as possible. ...

**B**ut in spite of the crow's instinct to feed on the eggs and young of other species (which he shares in common with several other birds), who would really wish to see him quite exterminate so resourceful a fellow? His destruction to crops is certainly far less than that of the bobolink in the Southern rice-fields. He is an

efficient scavenger, and his destruction of white grubs, cut-worms, wireworms and grasshoppers is of great value. Above all, however, his place in our landscape is such that his passing would leave a dreary void. Winter or summer, we are conscious of him against the sky, against the fields, or sentinel on a patriarch pine. In the misty mornings of summer when the sun has not yet rolled up the curtains of cloud from the mountains we hear his voice far off in the woods, rousing us from slumber, and when autumn has come and our sugar-groves are a glory of crimson he is still there, his distant call floating down sweetly from the upland woods and intensifying in some strange way the height of the peaks beyond. He calls over the peaceful meadows of Middlesex, where Thoreau wandered; he calls from the wilderness of the White Hills, from the Long Island shore, from the rapids of Niagara, from the corn-fields of the West. The corn itself is not more American than he, no more closely woven into the texture of our memories, into our national consciousness. Probably we could not exterminate him if we would. But, after all, why should we?

## NUMBER NOT UP

Dear Friends of the black magic world.

I don't know where I've been but I feel like I must have fallen off a ledge when I hit 86. My joints just rusted out. I'm certainly pleased to hear from you. Crows have been very scarce the past three years but before all the cold and snowy weather crept upon us, I did see three very cheerful and playful ones enjoying the air currents above. I'd like to fledge off today and join that group. It couldn't be anything but an exciting adventure.

Keep well and warm with your eyes to the sky and your ears toward the chortle.

I don't know if I ever had a number but if I did, it still is not up. – *Corvi 311, Goshen, Ind.*

## VOCAL

Dear Corvis,

Thank you for your great publication. I have enjoyed it thoroughly every time I've gotten it.

I did my thesis on vocalizations of blue jays in 1989 and have never ceased to be fascinated with this group.

Enclosed also is a fair copy of one of my pencil sketches of a displaying raven. The copy machine does not capture the subtleties of the shading but you are welcome to use it. – *Corvi 916, San Antonio, Texas*

*Editor's note: Corvi 916's sketch appears on page 10*

## TAKING COUP

Corvi Chronicle

My wife and I were riding on a mountain bike trail this past summer in northern lower Michigan and stopped to rest, when we heard a raven calling in the distance. I began to mimic it, using my best (poor) imitation, repeatedly trying to get a response – but with no luck. With

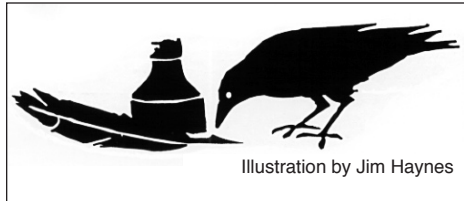


Illustration by Jim Haynes

## LETTERS

impunity (I thought), I then began making “challenging” noises – raspberries, guttural guffaws – but still with no reply. So we moved on.

During our next stop, we were surprised to see that a raven had landed not too far from us high up in the trees. It called softly a few times, just enough to alert us to its presence. It soon flew away, however, and we rode on. But after a half-mile or so, we were startled to see a raven flying down the trail and heading straight for us! As it neared, it began cawing loudly, dipped slightly just before reaching us, then turned sharply upwards and disappeared into the canopy. I had to laugh. “Well, I guess he showed us!” I said. And then thought of “taking coup” – the Plains Indians’ fierce charge and bold slap of his adversary to show him contempt. We’d been given our come-uppance! It took a while, but revenge, after all, is a dish best served cold! – *Corvi 6060, Portage, Mich.*

## RETURNS TO ROOST

Dear Chroniclers,

I have recently discovered that your website is back up. I'd thought you'd flown the roost. That idea was also fostered by the fact that I haven't received a Corvi Chronicle since September 2005 despite the fact that I had written to you along with a monetary contribution, from my current address and had received a postcard dated Sept. 20, 2005, confirming your having received that contribution.

I just finished printing both 2007 issues on my old inkjet, a very tedious affair. At this time I am missing both issues that I suppose were printed in 2006. I would also appreciate receiving future issues, including the first of 2008, as well. – *Laughing Raven, Portland, Ore.*

## RETURNED TO SENDER

Editor's note: Laughing Raven's letter brings up an excellent right-wrong point. Each time we publish a Chronicle, about 15 copies are returned to sender as “undeliverable” with no forwarding address. We also receive another dozen returned with expired forwarding orders. The board's minions record the forwarding addresses but have stopped attempting to mail the returned issues a second time. Too often the second mailings are returned also. Those returned without forwarding addresses are removed from the mailing list. Inexplicably, as so many mishaps are, the 2006 issue to Laughing Raven was returned as undeliverable despite a correct address. Until we received Laughing Raven's letter in January with the same address, we assumed the Post Office had not delivered the issues for lack of a proper address.

In the past few years, we've also had one to two tattered copies of each issue returned to us in envelopes by the U.S. Postal Service because the ASCAR return address was all that remained of the mangled issue. We are then mystified as to which corvi has gone without an issue. In January, the board received at least two email notes from corvi lamenting that their issue had been so badly roughed up in delivery that they couldn't read much of it. Current issues are online. We're working on getting past issues into shape to post online too -- in good time.

## REACHING BACK

*Editor's note: Laughing Raven's note gave caws to search our correspondence files for LR's earlier letters. We did and so enjoyed LR's May 15, 2002, letter sent from Grants Pass, Ore., that we inserted it here.*

## LANGUAGE TEACHER

Dear ASCAR,

I ... was turned on to your existence by a friend and fellow Corvi. I figured I should at least write to you. Laughing



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Proceeds go to Corvi Chronicle



## LETTERS *continued*

Raven is my music publishing company (ASCAP) with those of us involved in producing this music sharing a love and affinity for ravens. Rural Oregon is chock full of ravens and I have a couple of favorite stories to share.

The edge of a mountain range at the edge of the Siskiyou where I lived was also home to an average of six adult nesting raven pairs plus assorted juveniles year-round. One summer I noticed that one of these youngsters would habitually perch in the same Douglas fir not too far from my back door, calling incessantly in its high-pitched voice. It would show up at about the same time every day, so I would make it a point to go out and talk to it. I decided to teach it to speak some English since I was so poor at speaking raven language, so I started with a simple "hello."

With daily reinforcement it took me less than a week to get this raven to two syllables. A triumph, or so I thought ...

At this time an adult arrived on the scene and decided that an enough was enough; it wasn't going to allow its kid to be corrupted by the white trash living next door and it certainly wasn't going to put up with any foreign language-speaking nonsense! My prospective protégé was promptly banished from sight and relegated to roosting in the stand of trees furthest from the house next to the creek where it complained and carried on incessantly for days, eventually flying off in search of its own territory.

What was the funniest thing I've ever seen a raven do? A friend and I were out for a woodsy drive and came across two ravens feeding in the middle of the road, a common sight, except that this pair were



### YELLOWSTONE

Dear Corvi in charge:

We were introduced to the Corvid experience last year at Yellowstone National Park. Our chance meeting with him proved to be the classic "brief encounter." He was sitting atop a car in the parking lot – jet black and shining – somewhat tattered – but regal and lively nonetheless. He was caw cawing something about receiving a handout – a small dead mouse, a piece of dead snake

or, if all else failed, perhaps a few crackers. Luckily, we had some popcorn which he devoured immediately.

He was really quite unforgettable, and since that time we have been on the lookout for another such experience here at home. No luck so far but we won't give up.

Please find enclosed picture of Mr. Black. Also please consider this my request to become Corvid 6579. – *Corvi 6579, Charlotte, N.C.*

noshing out of a white plastic grocery bag. I expected them to wait until the very last minute before bailing, which they did, but to our amusement, not before one of them grabbed the bag by the handles and carried it with as it flew off! – *Laughing Raven*

### COCKATOO

*Editor's note: While fishing around the old correspondence files, we found this letter from November 2005 from Corvi 3x19 to the 9th power.*

Hello Fellow Corvidophiles,

I would like to become a member of

ASCAR. I love the website. I love the premise.

I share my life with many birds including a state and federally licensed, non-releaseable Fish Crow named Elroy. (As a licensed wildlife rehabber, I have to follow all the rules. The paperwork for Elroy's non-releaseable status was unbelievable.) Elroy is 3 years old but has never mentally progressed from the 5 to 8 week stage. He has multiple issues including a misconception that he is a cockatoo. -- *Corvi 3 x 10 to the 9th power, Sturgis, Miss.*

ASCAR now numbers — so think some who enjoy counting things — about 900 members. Alphabetically and in terms of interests and attitudes members range — an expression — from academics to Zoroastrians. But only the Editor and an associate minion know who and where they all are. This is in keeping with the Corvi Privacy Act that forbids

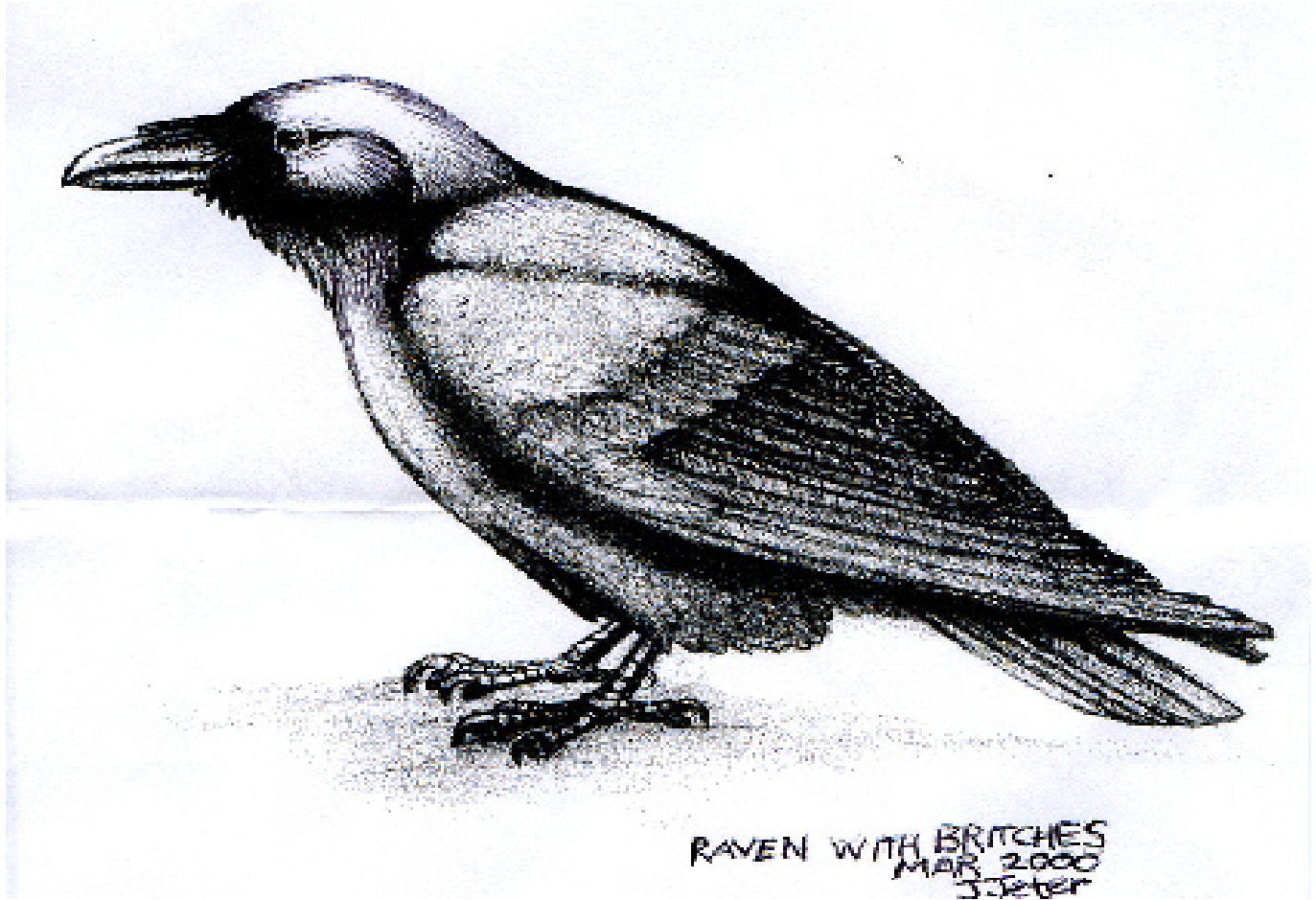
those who know from talking about or to other corvis or using their names and addresses in the Chronicle without permission. The CPA is occasionally tested by purveyors of crow curios wanting access to mailing lists.

However, because many members have similar interests

### Privacy act

and have indicated a desire to make the acquaintance of others who share them, some thought has been given to adjusting the CPA to accommodate these wishes. Therefore anyone who would like to hear from other corvi should send along their name and address to the editor. These will be published occasion-

ally in the Chronicle. Names are not absolutely necessary — Corvi numbers will do — but addresses are. Obviously those who wish to remain known only to the editor and her associate minion should do nothing and will continue to enjoy the protection of CPA.



### RAVEN WITH BRITCHES

Sketch by J.Jeter, San Antonio, Texas. See VOCAL letter to the editor page 8.

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#### **CORVI CHRONICLE**

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